

Touchstone

Surrey
Earth
Mysteries



No. 6

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GORDON SPINNEY

Once again I am afraid we have to begin Touchstone on a sad note, for since the last issue was published our good friend and loyal member Gordon Spinney has died. He attended our group meetings for many years with his wife Brenda, and will be well remembered by all of us for his lively debate and enthusiasm for the earth mysteries subjects.

Before he retired Gordon was a librarian at the British Museum, and his knowledge of archive work has very often been useful to us in our discussions. Apart from earth mysteries his interests have included gardening (particularly alpinists) and philosophy, in which he had just completed a thesis before he died.

Gordon will be sadly missed by all of us, and we send all our sympathies to Brenda at this sad time.

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OXFORD FIELD TRIP

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The group will be having a field trip in the Oxford area on SATURDAY, JULY 6TH. Could anyone who would like to come please let me know as soon as possible. The area is a very interesting one, and one particularly interesting ley has been found, linking a cross and three stones with similar sounding names.

We will meet at a point near Oxford - this is still to be decided. If you have difficulty with transport please let me know.

We will also be drawing up a fixed itinerary so that we do not have to wait for anyone who may be late for any reason - they can then find us by simply travelling round the course.

SKYWAYS AND LANDMARKS REVISITED, the report of our investigations into the researches of Tony Wedd, is now available from me, price '1 including postage. 44 pages, illustrated with photographs, maps and tables.

Jimmy Goddard.

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STRANGE SURREY

More reports of Curious and Unusual Phenomena in the County of Surrey, by Bob Skinner.

SEICHES - Unusual Wave Movements in Ponds and Lakes.

On 1st November 1755 there was a great earthquake at Lisbon, Portugal, and in about 8 minutes the majority of the houses and over 50,000 inhabitants were destroyed. The effects of this earthquake were seen in many places in Britain where Seiches and other unusual disturbances of lakes were observed. At Busbridge, near Godalming in Surrey, the following observation of the phenomenon was made:

"At half an hour after ten in the morning, the weather being remarkably still without the least wind, in a canal nearly 700 ft long and 58 in breadth, with a small spring constantly running through it, a very unusual noise was heard at the east end, and the water there observed to be in great agitation. It raised itself to a heap or ridge in the middle; and this heap extended lengthwise about 30 yards rising between two and three feet above the usual level. After this the ridge heeled or vibrated towards the north side of the canal, with great force, and flowed about eight feet over the grass walk on that side. On its return back to the canal, it again ridged in the middle, and then heeled with yet greater force to the south side, and flowed over its grass walk. During this latter motion, the bottom of the north side was left dry for several feet. This appearance lasted for about a quarter of an hour, after which the water became smooth and quiet as before. During the whole time, the sand at the bottom was thrown up and mixed with the water; and there was a continual noise like that of water turning a mill." (1)

One author, discussing the effects of the earthquake on areas of water in Britain, notes that the waters of a pond or lake at Cobham, Surrey were also observed to be disturbed. (2)

An account, very similar to the Busbridge one, refers to the old fishpond at Peerless Pool, which was off City Road in London, where water agitation was seen for several minutes by a number of people. An interesting part of this report reveals that another pool nearby was apparently unaffected, whilst a third pool examined subsequently by the witnesses had been "agitated in the same manner

with the fish-pond, the water having left plain marks of its having overflowed the banks, and risen to the bushes on their sides." (3)

Other locations where the phenomenon was noted on this day were Barlborough, Derbyshire; Dunstall, Suffolk; Earsy Court, Berkshire; Eatonbridge (Edenbridge?) Kent; Loch Lomond and Loch Ness, Scotland; at Shirburn Castle, Oxfordshire at 10 a.m., the moat water rose and sank; and at White Rock, Glamorganshire, an unusual rush of water was seen in the river at 6 p.m. (2) There also appears to have been an observation at Yarmouth. (4)

The explanation for these unusual observations is given by one author as follows: "The water in a lake or enclosed arm of the sea has a tendency to "slop" at one particular frequency, depending upon its size and depth. If this frequency coincides with that of the earthquake waves, it will resonate, and the waves will be magnified as if by a seismograph... The very largest earthquakes seem to be particularly effective in generating seiches, possibly because the very long-period waves are still of appreciable amplitude at great distances." (5)

A POND MYSTERY. The following newspaper report (which I stumbled across some years ago while searching for another item) has no connection with the phenomenon of seiches, but as it involves a pond, I will include it in the column on this occasion!

"A mysterious orange light glowing at the bottom of the pond at Worlds End, off Chalk Lane, Epsom had local police and firemen guessing last week. A local resident out walking his dog first saw the light and reported it to the police and fire stations. Firemen dragged the pond, without success on that night and on the following day a police diving team went down to investigate. They had no success either and by this time the light had gone out." (6)

REFERENCES

- 1 Clarke, Rev. C.C. Hundred Wonders of the World, cited in the Busbridge Lakes Guide.
- 2 The Wonders of Nature and Art (Knight and Lacy, London, 1828) p.145.
- 3 Hone, W, Every-Day Book (1826), Vol. 1 p. 975-7.
- 4 Tazieff, H. When the Earth Trembles (English trans. 1964) p.84
- 5 Eiby, G.A. Earthquakes (1957, 1968) pp. 166-7.
- 6 "Orange Glow Baffles Police", Epsom and Ewell Herald, 21 April 1977.

THE OLD STONES OF THE SURREY/HANTS BORDERS

1 - YATELEY

By Chris Hall

The hills of Surrey stand much as they have done for millennia: it is only the ways in which changing human cultures have dressed them which has altered. Monuments of 20th century lifestyles may be the most apparent, but somewhere in between the shopping precincts and three-laned motorways lie hundreds of works made by hands three thousand years in the past. In counties such as Surrey and Hampshire most are earthen mounds or banks, for outcrops of rock are relatively scarce. Yet there is no shortage of rock for those who need it, as shown by Waverley Abbey near Farnham, which was built almost entirely of Surrey stone.

It is Yateley in Hampshire which is the subject of the first article. Future ones will describe other sites on the Surrey/Hants border, including Bagshot Heath and Farnham areas, their local legends and lore.

Yateley Church (SU81756093). St. Peter's stands where the Saxons built a church sometime around 750 A.D., using as a corner-stone a large sarsen which already stood there. Stone Age axe-heads, arrow-heads and pottery have been found in the vicinity, leading local historians to conclude these and the stone are contemporary. The church was sacked by the Danes, but restored in about 900, retaining its original walls. (2)

As such the church stood until it was burned out by an arsonist in 1979. It has since been rebuilt, true to its original style, retaining those parts of the original walls which are still safe after the fire. The former floor was of red and yellow tiles depicting dragons and other fabulous beasts. (3) Today part of the sarsen can still be seen at the base of the wall on the left hand side of the porch. It must once have stood at least three feet high, beside the floodplain of "duddan broc", the "river of dark water", as the Saxons called what we now know as the River Blackwater. The name refers to particles of peat carried in suspension from the heaths, as distinct from the clear waters of the Whitewater, which the Blackwater joins.

But why raise a stone here, on the edge of a wide, shallow valley? The land slopes gently up to the south, but is otherwise flat. No recorded boundary ever passed this place, and the only known ancient trackway was on the north side of the valley, not the south. To my knowledge, no-one has seriously tried to answer the question, but a clue may lie in the name Yateley.

Unfortunately, no really early form of the name survives, but it apparently derives from the Old English "yat" and "leah", literally "gate-clearing". This has led to speculation about the

nature of the gate. The two frequent explanations are both unsatisfactory. The theory that it marked the gate into Surrey on the old trackway (now the A30) seems unlikely as this is some two miles away. A gate into the great Forest of Windsor is also unlikely, for Windsor Forest formerly stretched beyond Yateley. Either the etymologists are wrong about the gate, or the reference is to something else to be found here.

Standing at the church now, beside a busy road and surrounded by the houses of 25,000 people, it is not easy to step back in time to a distant landscape. If there was a gateway, perhaps the stone is the key. In a much more wooded country than we know today it presumably stood in a clearing. If that clearing opened on to the treeless floodplain of the river, it could indeed be a gateway of a special kind, for the river here flows for a mile from the direction of sunrise at the spring equinox, and this "leah", this clearing or place of light, would be the gateway through which the sun passed on the first dawn of spring.

REFERENCES

- 2 "St Peter's Church, Yateley" - Bob Browning (editor), 1981
- 3 "The King's England - Hampshire" - Arthur Mee (Hodder & Stoughton, 1939).

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As a tribute to Gordon Spinney, I am replacing my article in the "Old Straight Track in Surrey" series with an account of a very enjoyable ley hunt I had with Gordon and Brenda in August 1980. We followed a ley which Gordon had found running between the churches of Petersfield and Midhurst in Hampshire.

St. Peter's Church, Petersfield has a particularly beautiful and tall interior in which Norman work is very apparent, especially in the lovely round chancel arch decorated in typically Norman fashion. The church is aligned five degrees south of east, which makes it align with the ley we were following.

The next site visited was a group of tumuli on Petersfield Heath. These, according to the map, lie one each side of the ley. They were found, but their exact positions could not be ascertained as the church was not visible, nor was one tumulus visible from the other. They were, however, good pine-crowned mounds.

Next two tumuli, both on the ley, near a sand quarry were visited. One was in the process of being demolished by archaeologists in a "rescue bid" before it was taken over by the quarry. I have a slide of Gordon standing by the remains of this mound, which I have used in a number of talks since to illustrate the destruction of ley points. The archaeologists showed us the position of the other tumulus in a nearby field. Both were on the ley according to the map,

and the compass direction agreed.

A farm grazed by the ley had a track leading off it in the general direction, but not precisely straight. It then skirted the edge of a mill building (confirmed in the field). A little further on it follows a straight stretch of stream, and a parallel field boundary is separated from the stream by a belt of trees. Could the space where the trees are have originally been a wide trackway? It follows the ley.

The highpoint on Iping Common was not visited - there were several tumuli near, but not precisely on the ley. The line then grazes a road by a bridge, which we speculated could have been a ford. The first church in Midhurst which the line passed through was there - but is now a restaurant! It did not appear to be very old. The parish church, one street away, was an unusual construction, but unfortunately locked (it was also on the ley).

A track leading from the church towards the castle (through the churchyard) was cobbled where it crossed the road. It ends at a blank wall, but there is evidence that there was once a gate in the wall. We did not have time to visit the castle site.

This ley hunt, on a beautiful day in August, will always be memorable to me. The ley is not certain from the map, but walking it in the field gives many "little indications" in its favour.

THE MERCURIUS WRITER'S AGENCY

This is the first agency of its kind to specialise in all kinds of esoterica, including astrology, parapsychology, alternative medicine, paganism, earth mysteries and human potential. The principals are Jonathan Tootell, who was a buyer at the well-reputed esoteric bookshop Mercurius in South Kensington and is now the owner of the Hollywood Road Bookshop, and Michael Froomberg, lately of Thorsons Publishing Group. They have already found their services appealing to eminent established authors as well as new writers, and they hope to further the trend in which books in these areas are ceasing to be the sole preserve of specialist booksellers or publishers.

THE KNIGHTS OF DANBURY, by Andrew Collins. Pub. Earthquest Books.

This book is an interesting and rather enigmatic one. It is largely a well-researched historical document which concerns the medieval inhabitants of the village of Danbury in Essex, the St. Clere family, whose descendants are the Sinclairs of computer fame. The story centres on the discovery of a "pickled knight" below the church, whose body was preserved in a fluid resembling mushroom ketchup!

The investigators were apparently led to this research by a number of coincidental events, and the culmination was a vivid dream of a funeral procession which was, on historical investigation, found likely to have actually occurred. So the main mystery of the book is the question of why entities behind the scenes should go to such lengths merely to clarify the historical details of someone's funeral.

Among the conclusions the book presents are that the hilltop encampment on which Danbury is situated was once a place of sun worship and midsummer celebrations. Also, that the St. Cleres perpetuated and kept alive the old traditions, the evidence for which is presented in the book. Well worth reading.

MAKING THE MYSTERIOUS AND BIZARRE INTO A HOBBY.

This article on our group, written by Alyson Smith, appeared in the May 16th issue of the "Surrey Herald". It was accompanied by a picture of Richard Pywell and myself by the stone in Wisley church porch, and was the result of a visit by Miss Smith to one of our meetings. We are told that the group will discuss anything from ley lines to flying saucers, and that the main raison d'être of the group is to discuss the mysterious without being thought weirdos! The article was quite a sympathetic one to our subjects of interest and included quite a bit to attract people to our group, including my address for people who are interested. I have had a number of enquiries following its publication.

Jimmy Goddard.

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EXCHANGE LIST

QUICKSILVER MESSENGER, Garden Flat, 46, Vere Road, Brighton, Sussex.
 CAERDROIA, 53, Thundersley Grove, Thundersley, Benfleet, Essex.
 EARTHQUEST NEWS, 19, St. David's Way, Benfleet, Essex, SS1.8EX.
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 FORTEAN TIMES, BM-Fortean Times, London, WC1N. 3XX.
 NORTHERN EARTH MYSTERIES, 170, Victoria Avenue, Hull, HU5. 3DY.
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Our thanks to all exchange publications, especially those who have mentioned us.



The secretary of Surrey Earth Mysteries Group, Jim Goddard (left), and member Richard Pywell ponder the significance of the stone at Wisley Church, part of a ley line going through to Byfleet Church.